

Dear Members of the Montana House of Representatives,

We are family members and loved ones of murder victims. We desperately miss the parents, children, siblings, spouses, and other loved ones we have lost. We live with the pain and heartbreak of their absence every day and would do anything to have them back. We have been touched by the criminal justice system in ways we never imagined and would never wish on anyone. Our experience compels us to speak out for change.

We are writing today to ask your support in passing SB236, which would replace Montana's death penalty with life without parole. Though we share different perspectives on the death penalty, every one of us agrees that Montana's capital punishment system does not work for victims' families and that our state is better off without it.

To be meaningful, justice should be swift and sure. Life without parole, which begins immediately, is both of these; the death penalty is neither. Capital punishment drags victims' loved ones through an agonizing and lengthy process that holds out the promise of one punishment in the beginning and often results in a life sentence in the end anyway. A life without parole sentence right from the start would keep society safe, hold killers responsible for their brutal and depraved acts, and would start as soon as we left the courtroom instead of leaving us in limbo.

At the same time, a system of life without parole in place of the death penalty would save scarce funds. In Montana, we have spent a countless amount of taxpayers' money and diverted endless hours of court and law enforcement time to our capital punishment system. What has it bought us? Years worth of appeals, overturned sentences, and a system so broken that fixing it is probably impossible - all for what? Three executions that took decades to achieve.

Those resources could be spent in better ways if death-eligible killers were sentenced to life without parole. Law enforcement programs that work might have prevented the tragedies we suffered at only a fraction of the cost. A legal system free from the resource drain of the capital punishment system could find, prosecute, and sentence countless other criminals and even take dangerous people off the streets before they commit murder. Dollars saved could mean more counseling and aid to children orphaned by these horrible murders, or other services we so desperately need as we attempt to get on with our lives.

Only a handful of arbitrarily selected murderers are sentenced to death. Many of our loved ones' murderers did not receive an expensive trial or death sentence. Does that mean that some of our loved ones' lives were worth less? This policy is simply not worth the tremendous financial and emotional price.

It is vitally important that our state address the needs of surviving family and friends as we struggle to heal. We know that elected officials who promote the death penalty often do so with the best intentions of helping family members like us. We are writing to say that there are better ways to help us. The death penalty is a broken and costly system. Montana doesn't need it, and victims' families like ours don't want it.

Signed,

Amy Raftery Holzer

Victim: Paul A. Raftery, brother
Murdered in Helena, MT

Anna G. Valan

Victim: Steve Tungseth, uncle
Anna resides in Missoula, MT

Anne Raftery

Victim: Paul A. Raftery, brother
Murdered in Helena, MT

Antoinette Bosco

Victims: John and Nancy Bosco,
son and daughter-in-law
Murdered in Bigfork, MT

Bruce B. Huff

Victim: Robert Stanley Gordon,
half brother
Bruce resides in Great Falls, MT

Carolyn Mad Plume

Victim: Catherine Mad Plume,
daughter
Murdered outside Ronan, MT
Carolyn resides in Heart Butte, MT

Elvira Day Child

Victim: Alton Boyd Alexander,
nephew
Murdered in Box Elder, MT
Elvira resides in Box Elder, MT

Eve Malo

Victim: Grace Macdonald,
grandmother
Eve resides in Dillon, MT

Henry Day Child, Sr.

Victim: Alton Boyd Alexander,
nephew
Murdered in Box Elder, MT
Henry resides in Box Elder, MT

James A. "Ziggy" Ziegler

Victim: John Ziegler, father
Ziggy resides in Billings, MT

Jimmy Malatare

Victim: Catherine Mad Plume, niece
Murdered outside Ronan, MT
Jimmy resides in Arlee, MT

Karl Olson

Victim: Katherine Olson, sister
Karl resides in Missoula, MT

Kimberly Warhank

Victim: Walt Sullivan, uncle
Murdered in Shelby, MT
Kimberly resides in Helena, MT

Laurie Budlong-Morse

Victim: Daniel Moser, cousin
Laurie resides in Helena, MT

Marietta Jaeger-Lane

Victim: Susan Marie Jaeger, daughter
Murdered outside Three Forks, MT
Marietta resides in Three Forks, MT

Martha Poelman

Victim: Bernard Poelman, son
Murdered near Manhattan, MT
Martha resides in Manhattan, MT

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Mary Kay Raftery

Victim: Paul A. Raftery, son
Murdered in Helena, MT

Mary Molitor

Victims: Louise and August Kernze,
cousin, cousin's husband
Murdered in Three Forks, MT
Mary resides in Boulder, MT

Mary van Valkenburg

Victims: John and Nancy Bosco,
brother and sister-in-law
Murdered in Bigfork, MT

Marysue Davis

Victim: Tommy Irwin, cousin
Murdered in Wyola, MT
Marysue resides in Malta, MT

Matthew Raftery

Victim: Paul A. Raftery, brother
Murdered in Helena, MT

Michael P. Thornton

Victim: Ester Drinkwalter,
grandmother
Michael resides in Dillon, MT

Michele McGuirl

Victim: Stephanie Ciemiecki, cousin
Michele resides in Missoula, MT

Monica Gallegos-Laeupple

Victim: Sylvia Quayle, cousin
Monica resides in Havre, MT

Pauline M. Sjordal

Victim: Victor Clifford Sjordal, father
Murdered in Kalispell, MT
Pauline resides in Kalispell, MT

Pierre Malatare

Victim: Catherine Mad Plume, niece
Murdered outside Ronan, MT
Pierre resides in Ronan, MT

Richard Bishop

Victim: Anne Cournoyer, daughter's
mother
Richard resides in Stevensville, MT

Robert P. Raftery

Victim: Paul A. Raftery, son
Murdered in Helena, MT

Sharon Kaberline

Victim: Shirley Hamilton, mother
Sharon resides in Helena, MT

Shelly Calf Robe

Victim: Catherine Mad Plume, sister
Murdered outside Ronan, MT
Shelly resides in Heart Butte, MT

Stella A. Ziegler

Victim: John Ziegler, father-in-law
Stella resides in Billings, MT

Susan Finley

Victim: Catherine Mad Plume, cousin
Murdered outside Ronan, MT
Susan resides in Ronan, MT

Susan K. DeBree

Victim: Gretchen DeBree, daughter
Murdered in Great Falls, MT
Susan resides in Helena, MT

Tony Poelman

Victim: Bernard Poelman, brother
Murdered near Manhattan, MT
Tony resides in Helena, MT